

Over the snark

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I think I am done with the snark.

It occurred to me the other day as I read the thread of comments in a friend's Facebook post, with a bit of voyeuristic abandon, that the snide remarks weren't contributing to the common good or the common understanding and were maybe, just maybe, adding a little more ugliness to the world.

Let me be clear: I have LOVED a good snarky conversation. I have participated in many, at presbytery meetings, watching TV, over coffee and wine.

Let me be clear: there's a talent in being able to make good snark, not unrelated to the talent of making a good pun, which is, of course, the lowest form of humor.

Let me be clear: my tearing someone else down—no matter how clever, witty, or insightful I am—does nothing to build up that person or to build up me. And I think we are at a point in the world when we should all be doing something to build others up.

Then there's this: if you want to make a cutting remark or observation, be witty. Be satirical. Be ironic. Better yet, be self-deprecating even while deprecating someone else. Better yet still, be direct. If I am not willing to say something to someone's face, does it really need to be said? If I did say it, to what purpose? To make myself feel good? To be funny? To show off in front of my friends? To make the object of my comment change, or feel bad, or feel hurt?

When I was in sixth grade, there was a particular denim purse that was all the rage. Denim, wood handles, and embroidered with the girl's name or initials. Well, I didn't own such a purse. It's not that we couldn't afford it, but my mom probably thought that this purse would be used for about three months and then lost in the closet. And really, what does an 11-year-old need with a purse?

But I had transferred to a new school in sixth grade, and I wanted to fit in, so I decided to make my own purse. I took an old pair of blue jeans and cut them and hand-sewed them. I had sense enough not to attempt a monogram. I took the purse to school.

Oh, the looks I got. Oh, the whispers that suddenly stopped when I walked by. One of the bolder girls said, in a voice dripping with daggers, "Oh, Beth, did you make that yourself?"

I never wore that purse again, and I never hand-made anything cool again.

It's a good thing that most of us leave our junior-high selves behind. We grow up. We hurt and get hurt and in the course of all that we mature. But for me nowadays, every time I hear or read a snarky comment, I go back to junior high.

What if all the cleverness behind all those snide remarks was channeled differently? What if we stopped showing off, and started showing up with some kindness or compassion or grace?

*Originally posted at [Hold Fast to What Is Good](#)*